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To cite this article: Enrique Wedgwood Young (2020): Theorizing the Influence of Wartime Legacies on Political Stability after Rebel Victories, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism, DOI: [10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780005](https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780005)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1780005>



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Published online: 17 Jun 2020.



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Theorizing the Influence of Wartime Legacies on Political Stability after Rebel Victories

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ABSTRACT

This paper develops a theory which explains how wartime processes and relationships result in positive or negative ‘wartime legacies’ which can influence the degree of political stability experienced by countries after civil wars that end in rebel victory. Specifically, it predicts that variations in a) the character, scope, and extent of rebel-civilian wartime interaction, and; b) the decisiveness, costs, and pay-offs of victory, combine to influence the legitimacy, capacity to govern, and capacity to control that rebels have when they capture power. These legacies in turn shape incentives and opportunities for violent challenge to the new regime in the postwar environment, thereby lowering or raising the prospects for political stability. To illustrate the utility of the theory, it is applied to three cases which experienced differing levels of political stability following rebel victory; Cuba, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 3 February 2020

Accepted 3 May 2020

This article sets out to develop a theory that accounts for variation in the extent to which countries experience political stability following civil wars that end in rebel victory. Although some research suggests they are the most ‘durable’ form of civil war termination,¹ the historical record points to divergent outcomes following the capture of power by armed insurgents. Often, the aftermath of rebel victory is marked by persistent political violence and turmoil. This is not uniformly the case, however, as on other occasions victorious rebels succeed in establishing a relatively stable peace. I argue that this variation is influenced by wartime processes and relationships, which result in enduring ‘conflict legacies’ that facilitate or obstruct postwar governance and authority consolidation. Specifically, I propose that; a) the character, scope, and extent of rebel-civilian wartime interaction, and; b) the decisiveness, costs, and payoffs of rebel victory, influence the legitimacy, capacity to govern and control that rebels have when they seize power, and that this shapes prospects for political stability. To illustrate the utility of the theory, I apply it to three case studies which experienced differing levels of political stability following rebel victory; Cuba, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

Since 1945, roughly one in ten civil wars have ended with rebel groups seizing power.² Perhaps because of their relative scarcity, academics have in general paid scant attention to the outcomes following rebel victory.³ Instead, the literature is focused

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overwhelmingly on explaining the success or failure of negotiated settlements to civil war.⁴ Despite their infrequency, however, I argue that it is important to study rebel victories for two reasons. Firstly, for the relatively straightforward purpose of contributing to the literature on civil war and peacebuilding by focusing on a neglected set of cases. Beyond this though, rebel victories merit a special focus because they differ qualitatively from other forms of civil war outcome, and often herald momentous changes in the societies where they occur. When governments win civil wars, the “political status quo ante is preserved”, while peace agreements provide some “framework of a new post-conflict order”.⁵ In contrast, rebel victories mark an abrupt break with past configurations of political order, and their results are unpredictable in part because the new regime enters power in the absence of any agreed framework or settlement which may shape the course of postwar developments. Studying the aftermath of rebel victories may therefore yield important insights into how political order is constructed in post-conflict environments.

The article is structured as follows. I commence with a brief discussion of how I conceptualize ‘political stability’ and summarize how this varies across cases. I then provide a detailed description of the theory that I have developed to explain this variation. Thereafter, I apply the theoretical framework to three case studies to illustrate its utility. I conclude with a brief discussion of the generalizability of the theory, and implications for further research.

Conceptualizing Political Stability

Political stability is a highly contested term, illustrative of “the fuzziness and confusion existing in political science research regarding concept formation, operationalization, and measurement”.⁶ In this paper, I build on previous conceptualizations of political stability⁷ and define it as the *extent to which political and societal actors employ nonviolent strategies in their interactions*. To capture this empirically, I focus on the degree to which governments face organized violent challenges to their authority. I concentrate on the first decade following rebel victory in order to focus on the immediate aftermath of civil war and examine how this may be shaped by wartime processes. This definition is appropriate to the study of post-conflict environments, where normative priorities include the establishment of a state of relative peace, in which competition for resources and power is mediated by “prescribed systems of rules” rather than “conflict, violence and injury”.⁸

Adopting this definition of political stability, it is possible observe considerable variation in outcomes across historical cases of rebel victory. In several instances, stability was elusive as new regimes rapidly encountered organized violent challenge. For instance, we may look as far back as the mid-seventeenth century, when in the British Isles a victorious rebel army under the leadership of Oliver Cromwell executed their erstwhile monarch, seized the reins of government, and set out on what proved to be the “hopeless task” of “working out a new structure of government for the Commonwealth”.⁹ Cromwell’s revolutionary regime soon faced widespread resistance, disappointed even its most ardent supporters,¹⁰ descended into a violent and punitive despotism, and was overthrown after less than a decade in power. Far more recently in Libya, the defeat and summary execution of Muammar Qadhafi by a loose assemblage of rebel forces resulted in “three rival governments and parliaments, but barley any

sense of state anymore”.¹¹ Violence continued unabated, and within months of the rebel take-over, the UN concluded “that the human rights situation in Libya was now worse than at any time under Qadhafi’s regime”.¹²

On other occasions however, victorious rebels have succeeded in establishing their authority without any significant violent resistance. For example, in 1948, a small rebel army led by José Figueres managed to overthrow the Costa Rican government.¹³ Shortly thereafter, Figueres abolished the armed forces, declaring it “time for Costa Rica to return to her traditional position of having more teachers than soldiers”,¹⁴ and established a democratic regime that has endured peacefully to this day. In nearby Cuba, organized violent challenge to the regime established by victorious rebels was rapidly suppressed, and the government was soon able to claim near-undisputed authority throughout the island.¹⁵

One simple way of summarizing variation across a range of cases is to consider whether countries experienced a return to outright civil war after rebel victory, an indicator that is frequently deployed in studies relating to the durability of postwar peace.¹⁶ While this only captures violent challenge that exceeds a certain threshold, it can serve as a rough proxy measure of political stability, especially if we consider the relative intensities of the conflicts experienced. The graph below, which draws on data from the Peace Research Institute of Oslo’s “Battle Deaths Dataset”,¹⁷ provides an overview of variation using this measure (Figure 1):¹⁸

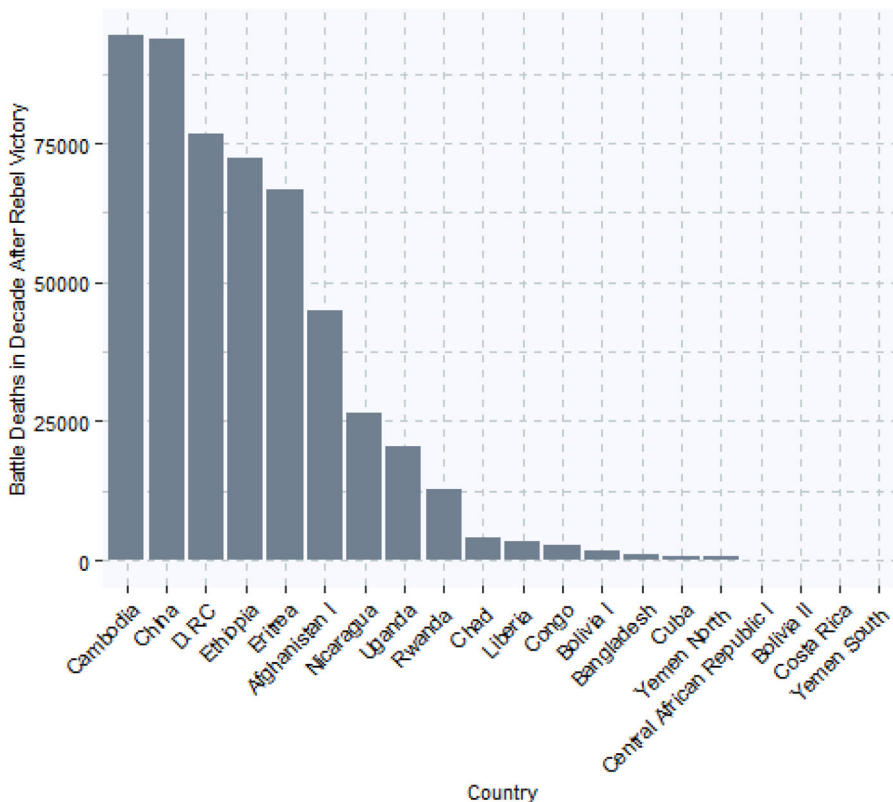


Figure 1. Absolute number of battle deaths in the decade following rebel victories.

Source: PRIO Battle Deaths Dataset. N.B. PRIO’s Battle Deaths Dataset contains low and high estimates for the number of battle-deaths per year in a given conflict. I have taken an average of these two estimates in each case to produce my figures.

Theory

The theory I have developed to account for this variation posits that process and relationships that unfurl during a civil war create enduring legacies that influence a victorious rebel group's prospects for achieving postwar stability. These wartime processes and relationships are grouped into two dimensions:

1. 'Fighting the war'; where the focus is on variation in the character, scope, and extent of wartime interaction between rebels
2. 'Winning the war'; where I focus on variation in the decisiveness, costs, and pay-offs of victory

The wartime legacies created by variation along these dimensions include a) the domestic legitimacy of the new regime; b) its capacity to govern; and c) its capacity to control the state's territory and deter violent challenge. By influencing the incentives and opportunities for violent challenge to the new regime in the post-conflict environment, these conflict legacies shape the prospects for political stability. I now turn to a fuller discussion of the theory to draw out the various mechanisms at play.

Fighting the War: variation in Character, Scope, and Extent of Wartime Rebel-Civilian Interaction

Most writers agree that "no insurgent movement can survive without 'civilian support', and neither can incumbent victory be achieved without it."¹⁹ My first proposition, which resonates with other recent research,²⁰ is that the influence of interaction between rebels and civilians reaches beyond the end of civil war and can shape developments in its aftermath. Specifically, I argue that variation in the *character*, *scope*, and *extent* of wartime rebel-civilian interaction can influence the legitimacy of the new regime, as well as its capacity govern effectively in the post-conflict environment.

By *character* I refer to whether relations between rebels and civilians during the conflict were broadly cooperative or hostile. Weinstein captures this variation well in his observation that despite ostensibly similar goals, rebels in Sierra Leone "hacked, raped, and pillaged their way through the countryside", while Nepali rebels "transformed local structures of governance, mobilized large numbers of civilians, and killed fewer than 1,000 people in nearly ten years of fighting".²¹ That some rebels choose to establish cooperative relations with civilians indicates that some wars are often both military contests and political contests of legitimacy.²² Legitimacy, defined here as a belief "in the rightness of an armed group's agenda and activities" is crucial because in order to establish a sustainable reservoir of domestic support, rebels must justify their use of violence against the state in the eyes of those for whom they claim to fight.²³ In order to cultivate domestic legitimacy and demonstrate their "political capacity to govern in the future",²⁴ rebel groups may develop exchange relationships with civilians, involving the provision of public goods in return for material and moral support. This process can result in the development of an "implicit social contract", which, if adhered to, results in the emergence of "legitimate authority".²⁵ Such legitimacy may persist into the post-conflict period and benefit the new regime. I summarize this expectation as follows:

Expectation 1: Cooperative wartime relations between rebel groups and civilians result in greater legitimacy for the new regime

By *scope* I refer to how broadly rebels intervene in civilian affairs, and the extent to which this is institutionalized through formal political structures. I borrow Arjona's taxonomy and consider interaction to be broad when rebels "regulate activities beyond security and taxation such as politics, the economy, social relations, and private conduct".²⁶ Broad intervention typically necessitates the development of new or co-option of existing formal political and bureaucratic institutions.²⁷ These may perpetuate after rebel victory, enhancing the capacity of the new regime to govern effectively in the post-war period. Effective governance is defined in this context as the ability of the new regime to both consolidate its authority and deliver economic and social benefits to the population. Wartime institutions may be beneficial in this regard because "structures and practices developed at the local level during a crisis have the potential to be turned to more constructive purposes after the termination of fighting".²⁸ Broad intervention also implies a denser network of exchange relationships, and this can result in the new authority rooting itself more solidly in the region.²⁹ This resonates with the wider literature on war as a process of state-building, epitomized by Tilly's argument that the coercive and administrative capacity of modern nation-states can be traced to wartime institutional developments.³⁰ This expectation is summarized as follows:

Expectation 2: When the scope of relations between rebels and civilians entails the development of formal political institutions for organizing civilian life, this enhances the capacity of rebels to govern effectively in the post-war period

The influence of these two mechanisms may be mediated, however, by the *extent* of rebel-civilian interaction. By this I refer to the proportion of the citizenry with whom the rebels interact, and whether this interaction is inclusive and cuts across preexisting ethnic or religious cleavages, or is exclusive and reflective of those divisions. Several authors have noted that territorial control is a pre-requisite for the establishment of broad and cooperative relations with civilians during civil wars.³¹ Therefore, while a rebel group might exhibit highly cooperative and institutionalized interaction with civilians, these may only encompass a very low proportion of the citizenry if the rebels only control a small amount of territory. Moreover, when civil wars occur in a context of ethnic or religious fractionalization or are fought along such lines, the extent of rebel interaction with civilians may be limited to those with whom they share an ethnic or religious identity.³² As Elisabeth Wood observes, "armed organizations often draw from particular groups, e.g. a specific ethnic group, not only because incoming recruits will be much more likely to endorse a particular agenda... ...but also because they are likely to bring with them the norms and beliefs concerning the appropriateness of violence against other groups".³³ Should rebels succeed in capturing power with such an exclusive support base, this may in fact detract from their postwar legitimacy as groups who were excluded from wartime interaction with rebels may view the new government with suspicion or hostility. From this I derive the following expectation:

Expectation 3: If wartime rebel-civilian interaction is exclusive and mirrors ethnic or religious cleavages, this may have a negative influence on the new regime's domestic legitimacy and its capacity to govern effectively

Winning the War: variation in the Decisiveness, Costs and Payoffs of Rebel Victory

Victory is an under-theorized concept, above all in contexts of civil war.³⁴ The results of conflicts are often portrayed in black and white terms, as ‘victory’, or ‘defeat’, and there is a “persistent, intuitive belief that decisive success on the battlefield confers victory in war”.³⁵ However, victory and defeat are not monochromatic outcomes. As Nolan argues, Warfare is “an arena of gray outcomes, partial and ambiguous resolution of disputes and causes”,³⁶ and victory does not always guarantee the ability to “translate combat into the achievement of an important strategic and military goal that the other side is forced to recognize and accept when the war is over”.³⁷ In other words, victory varies in the extent to which it is truly *decisive* with respect to the political goal (in this context, the capture of state power) that gave rise to the conflict in the first place.

Operationalizing the ‘decisiveness’ of victory in civil wars is challenging, however. One way of doing so though is to evaluate the military capacity of the victorious side relative to the residual capacity of the defeated side. Monica Toft has argued that in civil wars, “victorious armies are typically large, disciplined, and well-equipped”.³⁸ This is not always the case, however, as the threshold for achieving victory in civil wars may sometimes be relatively low. In some cases, rebel victory may in fact reveal more about the weakness of the defeated incumbent than it does about the military capacity of the triumphant rebels.³⁹ At other times, victory may only have been achieved thanks to high levels of external military support. In such cases, rebels may enter power without the high level of military capacity that is often associated with victory.

The residual military capacity of the defeated opponent is also subject to variation, and whatever capacity does remain can pose a threat to the victorious group. An ‘ideal’ victory would imply a complete degradation of the defeated party’s capacity to pose further resistance, but reality often fails to match this ideal. In fact, victory by rebels in civil war is often equated with the capture of a country’s capital city, irrespective of whether this reflects actual levels of control over the rest of the territory.⁴⁰ Partisans of the defeated regime may flee to territory not controlled by the victorious rebels, or even to neighboring states, where they may accept or resist the new reality.⁴¹ In the latter case, the new regime may be faced with an immediate armed challenge to its authority, particularly when the defeated party has access to support from internal groups hostile to the new regime, or external support from foreign governments. The greater the military capacity of the victorious side, however, the less threatening this challenge is likely to be to their survival.

Decisiveness is therefore understood as a function of the military capacity of the victorious side on the one hand, and the residual capacity of the defeated side to pose further resistance. The greater the military capacity of the victorious party in relation to the residual capacity of the defeated side, the more decisive is victory. Decisiveness is important because it provides the new regime with the capacity to control the state’s territory and deter or suppress violent challenges to the new order. I summarize this expectation as follows:

Expectation 4: Decisive victories provide victorious rebels with greater capacity to control the state’s territory and deter or suppress violent challenge in the post-conflict environment

Victory can also vary in terms of its balance of *costs* and *payoffs*. Costs, in this context, refers to both the number of individuals killed as a direct result of the preceding conflict, and war-related damage to the country's economy. The human cost of conflict is important to consider because violence experienced during wartime can influence "support for peace, intergroup relations, political behavior, and tolerance, which may reach far into the postwar period".⁴² High levels of wartime violence can make for a particularly febrile postwar environment. For example, as Quinn and colleagues have recently suggested, "high casualty rates increase the likelihood civil war recurrence by hardening hatreds and distrust between former protagonists and thereby making their reintegration into a single society more difficult".⁴³ Extensive economic damage can also undermine a new regime's capacity to govern effectively through reducing available resources and imposing high reconstruction costs.

By *payoffs*, I refer to what the victorious rebels inherit in terms of institutions, infrastructure, and fiscal capacity from the former regime. These will be shaped in part by the associated costs victory, as discussed above. However, payoffs will also be influenced by the political character of the defeated regime. Personalist regimes, for example, are associated with weak state institutions, and may therefore leave different legacies from one-party regimes, which often do "have the institutional capacity to formulate and implement accommodative policies when challenges arise".⁴⁴ Victorious rebels that inherit functioning political and economic institutions and infrastructure will find the task of postwar governance more straightforward, as these will not need to be rebuilt from scratch. In summary, the lower the costs and the higher the payoffs from victory, the greater the capacity for victorious rebels to effectively deliver public services and facilitate reconciliation in the postwar period. This expectation is summarized as:

Expectation 5: A favorable balance of costs and payoffs of victory can enhance the capacity of victorious rebels govern effectively in the post-war period

Wartime Legacies and Their Influence on Political Stability

The variables described above create enduring wartime legacies that either hinder or support victorious rebels' ability to achieve postwar political stability. Specifically, they affect the new regime's legitimacy, its capacity to govern effectively, and its capacity to control territory and deter internal violent challenge. I now discuss how each of these legacies influences the prospects for political stability.

Rebel groups that that developed cooperative relations with civilians during wartime are likely to enter power with higher levels of legitimacy than those that do not. Legitimacy is fundamental to ensuring stability in the postwar period, for although the basis of victorious rebels' claim to rule comes from the defeat of their opponents,⁴⁵ a widespread belief in rightfulness of the new regime's claim can transform coercive control into more enduring, institutionalized power.⁴⁶ This is because legitimacy encourages normative compliance with the new authorities.⁴⁷ As Mampilly argues, "governments viewed as legitimate benefit from greater loyalty among the population that can help them stabilize their rule, collect resources, and improve their survival prospects".⁴⁸ In other words, where a regime enjoys a high degree of legitimacy, civilians will have little incentive to rebel. Moreover, any organizations seeking to violently challenge the

authority will find little domestic support, because “the more legitimate authority persists in a region, the more likely the population will reject the claims of challengers”.⁴⁹ This expectation is summarized as follows:

Expectation 6: Rebels who enter power with higher levels of legitimacy are less likely to face violent challenge than those that do not, as incentives and opportunities for challenge are reduced

I have also argued that rebel groups who develop local political institutions through their wartime interactions with civilians enter power with a higher capacity to govern effectively than those that do not. This is also influenced by the quality of political and economic institutions inherited from the defeated regime, what I term the ‘costs and payoffs’ of victory. The capacity to govern is important of postwar stability because it provides the new regime with the ability to implement accommodating policies and deliver public goods which “reduce the incentive of groups in society to choose a resumption of armed conflict over sustaining the peace”.⁵⁰ When civilians perceive the new regime to be performing well, and improving their livelihoods and wellbeing, they are less likely to lend support to organized political actors seeking to upset the status quo. I summarize this expectation as:

Expectation 6: Rebels who enter power with a higher level of capacity to govern are less likely to face violent challenge, as the incentives and opportunities for challenge are reduced

Lastly, I have argued that rebels who achieve decisive victories over their opponents will enter power with a greater capacity to control their territory and deter challenge. The link between this capacity and political stability is straightforward. It facilitates the new regime’s ability to monopolize the use of legitimate force, and thereby discourage violent challenge and suppress it should it arise. In short, the opportunity for violent challenge is reduced. This expectation is summarized as:

Expectation 7: Rebels who enter power with a higher capacity to control are less likely to face violent challenge and more able to suppress it when it arises

It is also worth noting that these legacies can be mutually reinforcing. Legitimacy, for example, can enhance a government’s capacity to control its territory and deter challenge, as it “increases a population’s acceptance of the coercive enforcement of compliance”.⁵¹ The security that may be brought about through effective control can, in turn, reinforce the government’s legitimacy, as well as its capacity to govern effectively. Finally, effective governance can have positive influence on legitimacy as the population’s material wellbeing improves, and security forces are professionalized (Figure 2).

Applying the Theory

To illustrate the utility of this theory for analyzing outcomes following rebel victory, I now apply it to three cases; Cuba, Uganda, and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC, formerly Zaïre). These cases were chosen because they experienced differing levels of political stability following rebel captures of power.

Cuba experienced relative stability following rebel victory. In the first few years following the M26-7’s capture of power, the new regime faced “minor guerrilla

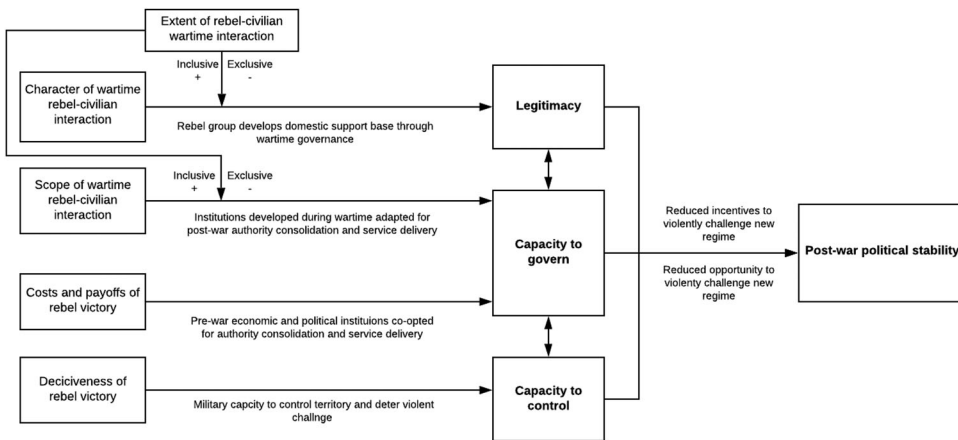


Figure 2. Illustrates the theory outlined above.

skirmishing” in the mountainous regions of the island and a failed, U.S.-backed invasion of counter-revolutionary exiles.⁵² Violent challenge to the new order was both ineffective and short-lived: by 1965, the last traces appear to have been extinguished, and “revolutionary organizations reigned supreme throughout the hinterlands and the state’s security apparatus penetrated deeply into every village and hamlet”.⁵³

In Uganda, the decade following the NRA’s victory can be characterized as ‘partial stability’, because while peace was restored to the southern half of the country, in the north the new regime faced violent challenge from several armed groups.⁵⁴ While this never seriously threatened the new regime’s hold on power, it had a profound and lasting impact on civilians in the north and the popularity of the government in that area.⁵⁵

In the DRC, the aftermath of the AFDL’s victory is a paradigmatic case of widespread instability. The rebel’s military success “heralded neither the reconstruction of the Congolese state nor the end of regional instability”.⁵⁶ Within a year of seizing power, the new leadership was facing widespread violent challenge. Two dozen insurgencies developed, turning the country into “one of the biggest battlefields in Africa’s history, threatening to envelope large swathes of the continent in a regional war”.⁵⁷ Between 1997 and 2003, an estimated 1.7 million people died as a result of this instability.⁵⁸

Cuba: Relative Post-War Stability

Background

In the 1950s Cuba presented a convincing façade of prosperity, ranking “among the top five countries in Latin America on a wide range of socioeconomic indicators”.⁵⁹ However, this masked a litany of accumulated economic and political problems, including long-standing dependence on sugar exports and concomitant vulnerability to fluctuations in “import quotas fixed by the United States”,⁶⁰ as well as persistent and often violent agitation about how political power on the island was organized. The immediate prelude to the civil war that ended in victory for Fidel Castro’s 26th of July Movement (M26-7) was a 1952 military coup headed by Fulgencio Batista. Batista’s government was both venal and repressive, though opposition to his rule was relatively widespread

and open.⁶¹ In particular, Cuban civil society was vibrant, and featured several well organized and subscribed interest groups including trade unions, professional and commercial associations, and student movements.⁶² While Batista did take some tentative steps toward restoring constitutional normality in the late 50s, this proved insufficient to convince all elements of opposition to his rule, and in 1956 Fidel Castro and a small group of rebels launched an insurgency in the mountainous Oriente province with the aim of forcibly deposing the regime.

Fighting the War: Wartime Rebel-Civilian Interaction

Rebel-civilian interaction in Cuba was cooperative, broad in scope, and extensive. To ensure that their insurgency against Batista's dictatorship had as much civilian support as possible, the M26-7 adopted a deliberately neutral ideological tone designed to elicit widespread appeal.⁶³ In Castro's own words, "one had to try and make the movement the most broad-based as possible" to ensure it acquired "the breadth ... [that] made victory possible".⁶⁴ From the outset of their campaign therefore, the rebels developed cooperative relations with the civilians in the mountainous province where they were initially based.⁶⁵ These relations were initially driven by mutual dependency, in which material support was given to the rebels in return for protection against the government's counter-insurgency campaign.⁶⁶ However, relations soon broadened in scope to include the administration of education, justice, and healthcare provision.⁶⁷ In 1958, one visitor to the 'liberated territories' was able to observe the presence of a "veritable military-agrarian state".⁶⁸

Although the amount of territory held by the rebels throughout the war was relatively small, their cooperation with civilians extended beyond those living in the warzone. The urban wing of the M26-7, known as the Civic Resistance, succeeded in uniting the disparate anti-Batista organizations behind their movement.⁶⁹ These organizations, which included opposition parties, trade unions, student groups, and several civil society and professional associations, had flourished in pre-war Cuba despite the authoritarian excesses of the Batista regime.⁷⁰ During the insurgency, they proved to be a receptive audience to the rebel army's urban wing, who convinced them to support the movement, and "thereby cultivated tactical alliances ... with groups ranging from Cuba's white-collar professional class to the Communist Party".⁷¹

Rebel-civilian interaction meant that it was "a combination of a military arm (the *guerilleros*) and a political arm (the urban movement) that ensured the final victory of Fidel Castro and his revolution".⁷² The legacy of this alliance extended tangibly into the postwar period, guaranteeing that when the M26-7 achieved their victory, they enjoyed widespread legitimacy and were "undisputedly at the helm of the Batista opposition"⁷³;

"On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro, the rebel army, and the July 26th movement were incontestably the liberators of Cuba, and virtually all Cubans supported them. Victory was not theirs alone, but the unfolding of the anti-Batista struggle had rendered them – not others – indispensable".⁷⁴

Furthermore, the pragmatic wartime alliance developed between the M26-7 and the Cuban Communist Party both enhanced the capacity of the rebels by bringing "much-needed technical and organizational skills that the M26-7 lacked"⁷⁵ and exerted a clear influence on the victorious regime's ideological orientation. According to Horowitz,

“the gradual extension of Communist ideological influence on Fidel, which grew out of the exigencies of alliance, convinced him that he was carrying out a socialist revolution. In 1959, with victory, he could declare it so”.⁷⁶ In summary, the character, scope and extent of wartime rebel-civilian interaction in Cuba ensured that when they entered power, they benefited from a high degree of legitimacy and capacity derived from political experience.

Winning the War: The Decisiveness, Costs, and Payoffs of Rebel Victory

Rebel victory in Cuba was decisive. That said, it was not the result of major confrontation between the rebels and the government, nor “any cumulative series of rural victories”.⁷⁷ Rather, the rebels’ road to power was smoothed by the collapse of Batista’s incompetent and corrupt armed forces, the rebels’ demonstrated capacity to hold territory, and widespread loss of support for the incumbent regime both at home and abroad.⁷⁸ The resulting breakdown in morale among the government’s armed forces was exploited by the guerrilla leadership, who succeeded in fomenting division between the faction-ridden military command and the rank and file of the army, causing the former to flee the country and the latter to lay down arms and practically welcome the rebel take-over. The rebels were so successful in this respect that when they eventually entered the cities, “the 26 July and Batista’s men were shortly seen fraternizing”.⁷⁹

Upon achieving victory, the rebel army was a relatively large, disciplined, and capable military force, comprising nearly 3,000 individuals.⁸⁰ This gave them a high degree of control over the country. Moreover, when they entered the capital to scenes of widespread jubilation 1959,⁸¹ the armed forces of the defeated regime had collapsed entirely and were in no position to offer continued resistance to the new incumbents. “The old bureaucracy was either absorbed into the revolutionary process or fled into exile. The old military had been crushed”.⁸² Any possibility of a power vacuum was precluded by the discipline of the rebel army and the members of the Civic Resistance, who emerged to occupy public buildings such as police stations across the country and generally kept order.⁸³ Recalcitrant members of the defeated military who had not fled the island were subjected to macabre ‘revolutionary justice’. The new leadership “oversaw the rounding up and executions of roughly 160 Batista officers”⁸⁴ and in this way, “the elimination of remnants of the Batista regime proceeded swiftly”.⁸⁵ Such revolutionary justice, while condemned by the United States, was greeted with enthusiasm by large swathes of the Cuban population.⁸⁶

There was one caveat to the decisiveness of the M26-7’s victory, however. The old regime’s capitulation at the end of 1958 was accompanied by the flight of their military and political elite into exile, mostly in the United States.⁸⁷ These were followed by a larger exodus of political and economic refugees opposed to the new regime’s reforms, and this formidable exiled community quickly became a main source of instability for the fledgling government. Settled in nearby Miami, they began to plot their return to power, aided by the United States Government, which was “absolutely determined to get rid of the Cuban revolution”.⁸⁸

The costs and payoffs of rebel victory in Cuba were highly favorable. Estimates of the number killed range from just 300 to 2000.⁸⁹ Economic damage was equally limited, and the M26-7 assumed power over a relatively prosperous economy and functioning

government administration; “there was no problem of postwar reconstruction... ... The old ways and personnel merely had to be converted, not defeated”.⁹⁰ In summary, the nature of rebel victory in Cuba provided the new incumbents with a high degree of both capacity to control and govern.

Winning the Peace: Navigating Wartime Legacies

Fidel Castro and his rebel army entered power with the benefit of positive wartime legacies. They enjoyed considerable legitimacy from a large domestic support base accumulated during the fighting, the defeated regime was in no position to offer immediate armed challenge to the new incumbents, and the rebels had assumed control over a functioning economy and government bureaucracy. In short, they enjoyed a high degree of legitimacy, capacity to govern, and capacity to control.

This gave the victorious rebels a fairly free hand in determining postwar priorities. Support for the revolution was cemented firstly through leveraging the economic resources inherited from the previous regime to deliver a series of social and economic outputs. Reforms were enacted which proved highly popular among lower and working classes, who in the short term enjoyed a “substantial improvement... ... in material conditions”.⁹¹ These included land reforms, the nationalization of industries, and a series of populist measures such as caps on rents for urban dwellers.⁹² Significant advances were made in public healthcare and education, and the last reliable public opinion surveys carried out in Cuba during the 1960s pointed to a high degree of support for the new regime.⁹³

Authority consolidation was achieved through a radical closure of the political space. Within a few years of rebel victory, political power was centralized in the hands of Castro and a select few, and rule by decree “subjugated or eliminated the major institutions of civil society – the media, professional organizations, civic groups, unions, and churches”.⁹⁴ Repression was widespread, as Cuba’s jails soon incarcerated more political prisoners than under any other previous regime.⁹⁵ At the same time, the support base and coercive capacity of the regime was broadened through the development of organizations of mass mobilization.⁹⁶ This included 90,000 ‘Committees for the Defense of the Revolution’ which “absorbed the revolutionary fervor of the early movement”⁹⁷ and a national militia “trained to combat any challenge to the revolution”.⁹⁸

While domestic support for the new regime was strong, the direction of the revolution was hugely unpopular among the island’s middle and upper classes. By 1962, up to 250,000 had fled to the United States⁹⁹ where they joined the political and military elite of the defeated regime. This resentful exiled community became the chief source of insecurity in Cuba, confronting the new regime with three threats to stability: “a formal or informal U.S. sponsored exile invasion, guerrilla warfare, or a spontaneous uprising generated by the elimination of the main revolutionary leaders”.¹⁰⁰ The latter two options were largely precluded by the effectiveness of the regime’s coercive apparatus, but U.S. support to the exiles did result in a failed invasion in 1961. The main effect of this, however, was to strengthen the popularity of the Castro regime and the effectiveness of its security institutions.

Uganda: Partial Post-War Stability

Background

A key point that needs to be stressed before discussing the Ugandan case is the ethno-linguistic antagonism between north and south that “came to dominate the country’s contentious post-independence politics”.¹⁰¹ This had its origins in Britain’s approach to incorporating and administering the Ugandan Protectorate, which in short involved economic and political favoritism for southerners, while northerners (deemed to be more ‘martial’ by the British) were “the biggest source of recruitment into the army and the police forces”.¹⁰² Despite the political preponderance of the south during the colonial era, it was a northern regime that took the country into independence in 1962, and ‘northerners’ continued to rule the country until 1986.¹⁰³

The two decades which preceded the civil war which brought the National Resistance Army (NRA) to power were marked by pervasive political violence and state collapse. After independence in 1962, creeping authoritarianism gave way to the brutal military rule of Idi Amin in the 1970s, which was eventually ended by an invasion of exiled dissidents supported by neighboring Tanzanian forces.¹⁰⁴ In the aftermath of this invasion, elections were hastily organized, which saw the return to power of Milton Obote, who had been the first leader of independent Uganda before being ousted by a military coup in 1971. These elections were widely considered to be illegitimate, “neither fair nor truly free”, the results enabled by “glaring political corruption”.¹⁰⁵ Yoweri Museveni, then a young militant from the south west of Uganda who had participated in the liberation of the country from Amin’s rule, refused to acknowledge the outcome of these elections, and along with 30 other men formed the NRA to launched their bush war against the government in 1981.

Fighting the War: Wartime Rebel-Civilian Interaction

Wartime rebel-civilian interaction in Uganda was cooperative and broad in scope, but its extent was limited to civilians living within the immediate warzone. When they started their insurgency, the NRA recognized the necessity of developing a “viable political base among the people in support of resistance... ...[that] would allow time to educate people, organize them, and develop structures that would replace the regime and not simply the individual”.¹⁰⁶ These structures were formalized as ‘Resistance Councils’ and came to be one of the defining legacies of the NRA’s wartime interaction with civilians. Initially, their functions entailed the provision of material and intelligence support to the insurgency, but as the war developed their scope broadened to include crime control and general administration.¹⁰⁷ Significantly, the Resistance Councils were the “first democratic governments ever instituted in Ugandan villages”.¹⁰⁸

The extent of interaction however was limited to the immediate vicinity of the warzone. This was in the south of the country, and the extent of cooperation thus reflected the north-south division discussed above. The limited extent also derived in part from the highly restricted and hence barren political landscape that prevailed in Uganda when the NRA launched their insurgency in 1981. Over previous decades, organized political and social bodies had all been eroded by the authoritarian tendencies of the post-independence government and subsequent military rule.¹⁰⁹ In the absence of

independent, organized political actors with whom to collaborate, the NRA was compelled to actively develop structures at the local level from scratch to facilitate interaction. While Museveni has repeatedly emphasized his desire to ensure that the NRA was not an “ethnic” insurgency,¹¹⁰ his war against the incumbent ‘northern’ regime was fought almost exclusively in the south of the country (near the capital, Kampala),¹¹¹ with the support mainly from southerners. Ethnic overtones to the conflict were thus inevitable and widespread.¹¹²

The legacy of rebel-civilian interaction was thus mixed. On the one hand, political structures at the local level developed during wartime provided the victorious rebels with a degree of legitimacy and an institutional blueprint for future governance, as they “spread the concept and practice of Resistance Councils throughout the whole country”.¹¹³ That they had to be *spread* was reflective of the limited extent of interaction however, which was mirrored by the new government’s postwar domestic support base. While the victorious rebels enjoyed considerable popularity in the south, in the north the new regime faced indifference, suspicion, and eventually outright hostility.¹¹⁴

Winning the War: The Decisiveness, Costs, and Payoffs of Rebel Victory

The NRA’s victory was only partially decisive. When they captured the capital Kampala in 1986, as many as 10,000 soldiers from the defeated regime’s army fled northwards to territory not controlled by the victorious rebels, “following the railway line along the east-north of the country that they knew so well”.¹¹⁵ There was widespread fear among the fleeing soldiers of imminent revenge by the new regime, both for years of brutal misrule that ‘northern’ regimes had overseen, but also for the atrocities committed by the defeated army while fighting the insurgents.¹¹⁶ Most significantly, however, the NRA lacked the military capacity to control the north of the country, and prevent the situation from worsening. Museveni’s own recollections express this vividly:

“By the time we entered Kampala, we had something like 20,000 soldiers under our command, grouped in a small number of oversized battalions, since we were short of good commanders. Even 20 normal-sized battalions, however, would not have been enough to control the whole country, especially with its history of insecurity and sectarianism”.¹¹⁷

The NRA’s victory had also come at an enormous price, which further compromised their capacity to restore stability to the country. Estimates of the number of military casualties exceed 40,000,¹¹⁸ but this figure was dwarfed by the number of civilians killed and the extent of damage done to infrastructure. According to Kasozi, “by the time the NRA stormed Kampala in 1986, close to half a million people had been killed, the infrastructure destroyed, social services neglected, the economy ruined, the need to preserve the environment forgotten, social discipline abandoned, and the quality of life undermined”.¹¹⁹ This compounded the institutional and economic decay wrought by two decades of misrule.¹²⁰

Winning the Peace: Navigating Wartime Legacies

The NRA assumed power with mixed wartime legacies. On the one hand, they enjoyed widespread legitimacy in the south of the country, as a result of their collaborative ties

with civilians during the war and the near-universal contempt that was felt there toward the ousted regime. The institutions that they had developed during wartime also provided them with a blueprint for a future governance arrangement for the country. This legitimacy, however, did not extend to north, an area which they were unable to control due to the only partially decisive nature of their victory. Moreover, years of war and misrule had decimated the country's economy, meaning that the new government had very limited capacity to start building support for the new order. In this vacuum, violent challenge to the new regime developed almost immediately, though this was confined almost exclusively to the north.¹²¹

Nevertheless, the victorious rebels were able to make use of the positive legacies that they did enjoy to consolidate support in at least half of the country after their victory. They did so through the development of a political system which drew on wartime experiences and struck a fine line between inclusivity and control. The key development in this regard was the extension of the Resistance Council framework of local government, developed during the NRA's guerrilla war, across the rest of the country under a system of 'no party democracy', otherwise known as the 'movement system'.¹²² The practical effect of this development was the consolidation of the new regime's authority and support base across much of the country through the appeasement of "a wide range of interest groups by giving them representation within the Movement and the government".¹²³

Alongside these political developments, the NRA delivered a set of economic outputs which also had the effect of increasing living standards.¹²⁴ More importantly perhaps, the NRA was able to guarantee security of persons across large swathes of the country, while under previous regimes state security forces had ranked among the greatest of threats to life and property.¹²⁵ For the most part, and at least initially, state security bodies under the NRA behaved as agents of law and order, and this was hailed by many as a "remarkable achievement".¹²⁶

The NRA's ability to take advantage of its positive wartime legacies allowed it to develop a high degree of domestic support after victory, as peace, improvements in living conditions, and a more inclusive system of governance were established. However, the new regime was not able to fully overcome the impact of its negative wartime legacies. In particular its lack of contact with civilians during the war outside of the war-zone and the partially decisive nature of its costly victory meant that it suffered from a legitimacy deficit and a lack of territorial control in the north. Moreover, the destructiveness of the war and abuses of previous regimes meant that the new regime's capacity to deliver improved living conditions across the country was highly constrained. The benefits of the new order were limited to the southern half of the country, and in the north the NRA was facing up to 27 insurgencies within two years.¹²⁷ The political violence that developed in this context did not begin to subside until 2008.

The DRC: Pervasive Post-War Instability

After a hasty independence process from Belgium, the Republic of Congo (as it was first known) immediately faced secessionist rebellions from two mineral-rich provinces in the east of the country. In the ensuing chaos, which saw intervention by both the

United Nations and the Soviet Union, the country's first prime-minister, Patrice Lumumba, was deposed and executed with the connivance of Belgian security services. This set the stage for a military coup by the Congolese army's chief of staff, Joseph Mobutu, who was to preside for three decades over one of Africa's most openly corrupt dictatorships.¹²⁸ By the end of his rule, during which he renamed the country Zaïre, much of infrastructure of the state had simply ceased to exist or function through decades of neglect and official predation.¹²⁹

The 1996 rebellion that ended Mobutu's presidency was provoked by his tolerance of and support to armed groups in the east of the country which were hostile to newly formed governments in neighboring Uganda and Rwanda.¹³⁰ The vast, densely-forested eastern region had long sheltered insurgent groups, but these latest elements had coalesced in the refugee crisis that followed in the wake of the Rwandan genocide. Following the capture of power by the Rwandan Patriotic Front in 1994, hundreds of thousands of refugees fled into eastern Zaire "including members of the Interahamwe militia, who took part in the genocide and then used the refugee camps as bases from which to launch attacks inside Rwanda".¹³¹ Mobutu's tolerance of these groups convinced the new regime in Rwanda of the need to help install a more friendly government in Zaïre. The Rwandan government, with support from their allies in Uganda, therefore helped to organize the Alliance des Forces Démocratiques pour la Libération du Congo (AFDL), with Laurent Kabila as its leader.

Fighting the War: Wartime Rebel-Civilian Interaction

With respect to wartime rebel-civilian interaction, the DRC presents a clear departure from our previous two cases. Here, rebel-civilian interaction was extremely limited, and where it did occur it was characterized by mutual suspicion. This was because the AFDL, which overthrew Mobutu's regime in 1997 did so with an almost exclusively external support base. Formed the previous year, the AFDL were a loose alliance of four opposition parties comprised mainly of exiles without "any grassroot structures or even a substantial membership".¹³² From the outset, external backing was provided to the rebels by the governments of neighboring Uganda and Rwanda, both composed, incidentally perhaps, of recently-victorious rebels.¹³³

One important result of the external genesis of the AFDL was that they had "very few followers" within the country itself.¹³⁴ Moreover, throughout the war they proved incapable of establishing any form of organized domestic support base. This was not through want of options however, as during the twilight of his reign, President Mobutu had lifted barriers to political participation under pressure from his European and North American allies, and in response there had been a proliferation of highly vocal, active, and organized civilian opposition parties.¹³⁵ However, any possibility for collaboration between the AFDL and the civilian opposition was precluded by disagreements between the two camps over the role of armed force in unseating the regime. This evolved into mutual antagonism, and outright hostility following the rebel leader Kabila's declaration that he "intended to run the country through a transitional government composed exclusively of the AFDL".¹³⁶

The principal result of the AFDL's wartime behavior vis-à-vis interactions with civilians was that they entered power having thoroughly alienated the domestic opposition,

without any prior experience of governance, and almost wholly dependent on the continued military and logistical support of their external allies.¹³⁷ Kabila's "failure to effectively mobilize a wide segment of Congo's citizens"¹³⁸ meant that that AFDL enjoyed little domestic legitimacy, and despite the unpopularity of the regime that they had ousted, were viewed by many as agents of external interests.

Winning the War: The Decisiveness, Costs, and Payoffs of Rebel Victory

While the AFDL's victory was decisive, the capacity which enabled this was largely external. In addition to helping organize the rebel group in the first place, throughout the short war, Rwandan soldiers "planned and directed military operations", and "participated in the capture of at least four cities".¹³⁹ Moreover, Mobutu's army, the Forces Armées Zaïroises (FAZ) had suffered from decades of neglect and offered scant resistance; they "were the mirror of the Zaïrean state, most of them existed on paper only".¹⁴⁰ As the AFDL advanced toward the capital, most of what remained of the incumbent's armed forces melted away, and some officers even sold weapons to the rebels.¹⁴¹ Thus, when the capital Kinshasa was captured, the defeated regime was in no position whatsoever to resist the new order. Mobutu himself had fled to Morocco. However, it was evident that the security of the new regime was dependent on the continued goodwill of its external backers; the Rwandese military "played a central role in his [Kabila's] ascent to power", and they would come to be "the main source of his troubles after victory".¹⁴²

Because the war which brought the AFDL to power was so swift, its direct costs were relatively limited. The best estimate of the number killed as a result of the conflict is 4,000 in total.¹⁴³ Economic damage was limited because decades of misrule under the previous regime ensured that there was in fact very little left to destroy. Over the preceding decades, "the economy had been systematically asset-stripped by Mobutu, and the population avoided starvation thanks only to a thriving informal sector. There was no transport or telecommunications infrastructure. Few schools and fewer hospitals survived, and their personnel went unpaid for months or years on end"¹⁴⁴ The payoffs from victory were thus virtually non-existent. There was nothing by way of institutions that the rebels could co-opt to serve their purposes, and no infrastructure to facilitate the extension of their control over the country's vast territory.

Winning the Peace: Navigating Wartime Legacies

The new regime was crippled from the outset by a set of negative wartime legacies. They faced a latently hostile population who, though relieved that Mobutu's dictatorship had been overthrown, held the rebels in suspicion because of their lack of meaningful ties to the citizenry, the ominous wartime declarations they had made regarding the exclusion of the civilian opposition from postwar governance, and the highly visible role that the Rwandan army had played in their victory. Moreover, when they arrived in Kinshasa, the rebels found that the "lame leviathan" of Mobutu's state had bequeathed them nothing by way of resources that could be put to the task of governance.¹⁴⁵ There can be little doubt that the AFDL were dealt a bad hand, and this was partly of their own making. However, they then proceeded to play it remarkably poorly.

After seizing power, the victorious AFDL did nothing to develop a viable domestic support base, which had been absent throughout the war. According to Nzongola-Ntalaja,¹⁴⁶ “as a self-proclaimed ruler initially backed by external powers, Laurent-Désiré Kabila did not see the need to win the people’s confidence”. This attitude was reflected by the first action of the new regime, which was to make good on their war-time promise to completely exclude domestic opposition groups and civil society from any part in the new government.¹⁴⁷ This was followed by a clampdown on communication including restrictions on the freedom of the press, and the elevation of “military structures over administrative authorities”.¹⁴⁸ It became clear that the DRC was doomed “to witness a replay of the post-independence saga of replacing one brand of autocracy with another”.¹⁴⁹ In doing so, the AFDL missed the opportunity of blending the little legitimacy that they had accrued through their successful overthrow of a highly unpopular regime with that of the civilian opposition movement that had emerged during the last years of Mobutu’s rule.¹⁵⁰

Kabila’s heavy-handed approach to governance ensured that what little domestic support the new rulers did have quickly dissipated. Within six months, he stood “accused by many Congolese of having become a dictator who, in the eyes of some, [was] worse than Mobutu”.¹⁵¹ In the absence of domestic support, the only force underwriting the new regime was the Rwandese military. This in itself became a source of great resentment among the population, fueling a popular perception that the AFDL were in fact an “occupying force, with interests other than those of the Congolese people at heart”.¹⁵² Eventually, in a desperate overture to his domestic constituents, Kabila ordered the departure of the Rwandese forces in mid-1998.¹⁵³ In doing so, “Congo’s new king had turned the king makers into his most bitter enemies”.¹⁵⁴ With the departure of its foreign backers, Kabila’s regime lacked the capacity to control the vast territory of the DRC. Within months, the country descended into a period of anarchy which would see the emergence of multiple internal rebellions, and external invasions by predatory neighbors seizing the opportunity to plunder the country’s immense mineral wealth.¹⁵⁵ Congo’s tragedy continued unabated, with no end in sight.

Conclusion

James Scott makes an interesting observation about revolutionary regimes. On the one hand, the victorious party “has defeated the ancien régime, often has its partisans’ mandate to remake society after its image, and faces a prostrate civil society whose capacity for active resistance is limited”.¹⁵⁶ Yet at the same time “every revolution creates a temporary power vacuum, when the power of the ancien régime has been destroyed but the revolutionary regime has not yet asserted itself throughout the territory”.¹⁵⁷ A significant risk, at such moments, is that Antonio Gramsci’s dark theory of crisis rings true; that as the old is dying and the new cannot be born, there is an interregnum when morbid symptoms appear.¹⁵⁸

The theory I have outlined above provides some clues about the chances that victorious rebels have of successively navigating that vacuum and avoiding those ‘morbid symptoms’. The key argument that I have offered is that when civil wars are won by rebels, wartime legacies are highly influential in shaping the prospects for stability in

the postwar period. Positive legacies derive from cooperative, broad, and inclusive war-time interaction with civilians, which provide victorious rebels with a degree of legitimacy and capacity to govern. They are also created by decisive victories with a favorable balance of costs and payoffs that provide them with the capacity to control territory and deter violent challenge, as well as the resources needed to begin the arduous task of postwar reconstruction. Such legacies provide a good foundation for fledgling regimes to begin ‘winning the peace’. Negative legacies, on the other hand, derive from opposite processes; hostile or exclusive interaction with civilians, partial victories perhaps won with foreign assistance, and a lack of resources or capacity to engage in effective governance. Such legacies complicate the task of postwar governance considerably, increasing the risk of renewed political instability.

That said, while the influence of these legacies on the post-conflict environment is strong, it is not deterministic. The roots of postwar stability and instability may be buried in wartime legacies, but what becomes of these is influenced by the behavior of the new regime in the aftermath of its victory. In other words, positive legacies are not a sufficient condition for postwar stability, and negative legacies do not inevitably result in instability. A bad hand can be played well, in much the same way that a good hand can be played poorly.

The main contribution of this article to the literature on civil war termination and the sustainability of peace has been to offer a theory for divergent outcomes among an important and under-studied subset of cases. I have argued that in order to understand developments in the postwar period, it helps to look back to processes and developments that unfurled during the conflict itself, and identify how these can influence political developments once the fighting ceases. However at this stage, the theory cannot be confidently generalized beyond the three cases analyzed. To do so would require further research, involving perhaps the quantification of variables in each dimension that I have identified in a manner that would allow for a systematic assessment of their influence on postwar outcomes across the full set of cases.

Acknowledgements

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council [grant number ES/P000681/1]. I am grateful to Dr. Adrian Florea and Dr. Huseyn Aliyev for their valuable comments and suggestions.

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Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).